Hanford crews continue moving FFTF fuel

Fluor Hanford cleanup crews are continuing to move nuclear fuel out of the Fast Flux Test Facility as deactivating the reactor continues.

Workers at the Fast Flux Test Facility are moving the reactor fuel to safe storage.

"This is another important step in our work for the Department of Energy to deactivate FFTF," said Bruce Klos, FFTF acting project director for Fluor Hanford. "We've loaded 147 of the reactor's 375 fuel assemblies into dry storage casks and moved the casks to a safe storage location outside the facility. Our workforce is highly skilled, and the fuel movement is running smoothly."

Crews use specialized lifts to move the highly radioactive fuel out of a storage vessel near the reactor vessel, and they work behind thick panes of shielded glass to wash the fuel assemblies and place them into canisters. Seven fuel assemblies are loaded into each canister. The canisters are then loaded into dry storage casks that meet strict requirements for safe storage and transportation of fuel outside the facility.

The crews have loaded and removed three casks of reactor fuel from FFTF since deactivation work resumed in April. During an earlier fuel-removal campaign in the mid-1990s, crews removed 18 casks of fuel from the reactor and placed them on a storage pad outside the facility. Removing the rest of the fuel from the reactor will be finished in early 2006.

Fluor Hanford will soon begin moving the fuel casks several miles to two existing facilities in the center of Hanford to store the casks until a national disposal location is determined.

After the fuel has been removed, crews will drain the remaining 210,000 gallons of liquid sodium from the reactor's cooling loops and storage tanks into a sodium storage facility next to the reactor. Approximately 50,000 gallons of liquid sodium were removed from secondary cooling loops in April.

"We have a green light to continue with this deactivation work over the next several years, " said Beth Bilson, DOE-Richland's assistant manager for the River Corridor. "Next will come the decommissioning phase, which is essentially putting the reactor into its final end state. We've committed to analyzing the alternatives in an environmental impact statement, and there will be a full public-involvement process so we can hear from the surrounding communities on what FFTF's end state should be. For example, should we entomb it below ground? Should we remove it entirely? Those are examples of the types of alternatives we need to analyze and hear from the public on." ■